

SEABORNE COMMUNICATIONS MAKE-UP

U.S. Army overseas Radio Receiving Station (CW) Capalaba, Queensland, Australia, mid 1944.

When Captain Faithorn informed me that I was being assigned to Seaborne Communications and to move into a staging camp in two days, I asked no questions. Leaving Capalaba was like leaving home all over again.

I spent about a week at the staging camp before being transferred to an Ocean Lighter, OL22. This was a new boat that had been built in Sydney, 120' in length, 24' beam, sailed to Brisbane with a cargo, and upon unloading its cargo was berthed at the Bulimba Engineers Shipyard. This was right across the river from where the incoming troop ships docked. The Army Transport Corp. personnel vacated and several of us took over. Up to this time, and even when I left for home, June of 1945, from Manila in the Philippine Islands, I never knew the overall picture of Seaborne. Since then I have been able in my research to put the picture together.

The original plans for the invasion of the Philippine Islands was as follows: The Island of Mindanao, 15th of November, 1944; Island Leyte, 20th of December, 1944. We had our work cut out for us to get the OL's ready for those dates, but lo and behold, while we were in the process of working on the OL's, a high-level conference, stateside, changed the invasion schedule to invade the Island of Leyte on 20th of October, 1944, so we proceeded north with our work not completed, but were operational as headquarters Radio Stations. It wasn't until we reached Manila in the Philippines that the last nut and bolt went into place and we could stand back and say, "The job is done." But remember, from Hollandia, Dutch New Guinea, our first shake-down operation to the United States, we were operational.

One must remember that since early 1942 when the Army struck north and to the Island of New Guinea, it had to call on many water crafts to get the job done. That is a story in itself.

The main goal of Gen. MacArthur was to return to the Philippines and liberate that country. Some of the requests that went out to Maj. Gen. Spencer Akin, Gen. MacArthur's chief signal officer, forming Seaborne Communications were very important to the people requesting them. Gen. MacArthur wanted a broadcast ship so that when he went ashore on the invasion, he could broadcast to the people that he had returned. Also, instructions to be given to the band of guerillas ashore. The press was to use this ship also. In the past the war correspondents had to go back to Australia from the Islands to broadcast live to the U.S. Networks. The further north we went, the harder it was for them to turn in reports. The capture of Hollandia gave them their first broadcast facilities on land, making the trip back to Australia unnecessary. They went to Gen. MacArthur's media relations officer and requested better facilities to cover the war. From the two requests, a yacht called the APACHE was acquired for the job. Ex-President McKinley's Yacht, 50 years

old, became a broadcast ship known as the "Voice of Freedom," so here we have a ship that performs three functions.

In the past, having Army personnel such as Signal Corp., aboard a Navy ship, under command of an Admiral, to be used in an invasion, did not work out. The Admiral, at any moment, could recall the ship for some other purpose right when the Army needed it for the present invasion going on. Gen. MacArthur, realizing this, asked Washington for three Navy ships to be under his command. The wish was granted. The three ships assigned were Patrol Craft Escort Rescue. The rescue part is important for our usage. It carried a medical doctor and had space to accommodate 100 injured survivors. In this case, the doctor remained, but the space was used to accommodate Army Signal Corp personnel and necessary radio gear so that in an invasion radio units could be sent ashore right behind the invaders and communicate with the ship. So PCER 848 carried Maj. Gen. Spencer Akin, PCER 849 carried one of Gen. Akin's deputies, and PCER 850 carried the chief Signal Officer for the 6th Army in the Leyte invasion.

Also assigned to this invasion group was old faithful, FP COM 47 a Communications yacht that had seen many hours of service prior to this.

Along with this it was the desire of Gen. Akin to have, in essence, what was known as "Fixed Station Headquarters Radio Communications Systems," well removed from the fighting in on the invasion. They would put this type of station aboard Ocean Lighters and have them committed to the invasion area as soon as we had control of the air and sea. So this plan called for obtaining 7 Ocean Lighters. Four were to be used as floating headquarters stations, two receivers and two transmitters. This gave you the capability of leap-frogging or replacing a knocked out station. The priority circuit was over a single side band radio equipment to San Francisco, and then land wire to the War Dept., in Washington, D.C. The four cargo booms on each OL, when erected, held a few antennas so that you could get into operations as soon as you anchored. Then, for the long haul to San Francisco, a Rombic antenna was constructed ashore, or as in the case in Hollandia, right in the Bay, and this guaranteed us longer hours of communications per day to the States. Various other boom antennas could be used for your Island circuits.

The formation of Seaborne Communications in Brisbane, Australia where the first two OL boats were equipped, OL22 and OL30 was comprised of about 75 men. This produced a need: LIVING QUARTERS.

A search ended up by obtaining the pleasure cruise ship, Weeroona, a turn of the century (1910) steam side-paddle ship. In the past it had carried holiday people from Melbourne to Queenscliff, a seaside island resort. The ship was cleared of its holiday glitter and the typical five high bunks were installed on the main deck with canvas to protect us from the elements. All of the OL's and the

Weeroona were towed from one area to the next.

The OL31, was equipped with the SIGSALY (Green Hornet) telephone voice scrambling circuit, used by GHQ personnel. This equipment had to be processed through the headquarters radio station single side-band equipment to the War Department. This necessitated either a wire circuit or a V.H.F. radio link to get the information from Headquarters to the OL's. Of the two remaining OL's, one was a supply boat and the other was a Radio Repair boat.

As you can see, this was a good-sized operation overall and Lt. Col. Orville Davidsmeyer was put in charge of implementing all the above.

When all the units of Seaborne Communications arrived in Manila Bay in the Philippines, they were dubbed "GEN. AKIN'S GRAND FLEET."

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